Two Ghosts

by Merrin W. Dream

Ghosts have feelings. Write about what you love and only then will you feel free.
Dedication: For the unseen, the unheard, and those who wait in silence.

Author's Note:

This story is about restraint, silence, and the fragile spaces between words. It is about those of us who carry entire conversations in our heads, never spoken aloud, and the ache that grows in the gap between what we feel and what the world allows. Two Ghosts is a book about love—unspoken, unconsummated, but no less real. It is also a book about conformity: the way daily rituals, waiting rooms, and rules of correctness press us into silence. And it is a book about defiance: finding joy in rhythm, in detail, in the simple fact of being seen. Every line was written with the belief that love can exist in restraint, and that silence is not absence, but a different kind of presence.

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Act 1 – First Contact

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The morning burst like a curtain flung wide,
spilling blue light and chorus into the street.
Every sound was in its right position,
every colour sharpened as if chosen just for her.

Flin was already there,
on the wooden bench outside the surgery doors.
Of course she was.

Half an hour early wasn't strange,

it was correct.
Early meant no danger of rushing,
no threat of being late.
It meant stillness,
time to stretch the morning open
until it could hold her.

Her body buzzed with the brightness of it all,
as if the world itself had given her permission to hum.
Boots set neat on the paving stones,
daisies painted on them glowing like tiny suns.
She tapped the toes once, twice,
to make sure they were still hers.
Aligned.
Correct.

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The world seemed alive to her rhythm.
A robin hopped onto the edge of the bench,
its head twitching in jerks that matched the beat in her mind.
Pigeons muttered under the pharmacy sign,
soft bass notes beneath the robin's treble.
The hedge behind her joined in,
leaves rustling like shaken tambourines.
Even a grey squirrel skittered across the kerb,
claws scratching out a staccato riff.
A bee drifted past her ear,
its buzz a low cello drone in the mix.

She couldn't help but smile.

It was as though the animals knew —
today she was filled right to the top.
A battery fresh from the charger,
every cell lit.

She drummed her fingers on her rucksack straps,
a private percussion.
The street gave her an orchestra in reply.

A cyclist's bell chimed — triangle.

A dog barked twice — snare.

Car tyres whispered across wet tarmac — brushes on a drum.
She pictured herself conducting it,
lifting one hand, dropping the other,
bringing the whole world in on time.

Raindrops from last night slid down the bench arm,
catching rainbow fragments as they fell.
She counted them:
one, two, three.
Each drop like a perfect note.
Each splash a new bar of music.

Her chest swelled with it.
Every part of her body wanted to move, to spin, to laugh, to sing out loud.
But she sat still,
holding the joy like a secret bird in her palms,
afraid it might fly too soon.

Joy was too small a word.

∴

Too small, too thin.
Delight? Happiness? Gladness? Bliss?
No. None of them big enough.
This was something greater.
This was the world saying yes.
This was being lifted,
as if invisible threads had tied balloons to her shoulders and were pulling her gently upward.

She thought:
Anything.
At all.
Ready.

:·

The morning was still bright when Orin arrived.
Half an hour early — always — the number that meant
he would not stumble,
would not hurry,
would not arrive with shame.
It was correct.
Sensible.
Right.

The wooden bench waited where it always did.
He lowered himself onto it carefully,
hands resting on his knees,
shoes lined square against the paving stones.
Aligned.
Correct.

The light caught on the windows above the pharmacy,
a flare, then a steady glow.
He liked that.
The order of it.
The day announcing itself in sequence.

A bird scissored past,
its wings throwing a shadow that darted over his shoes.

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He tracked it, stored it,
let the moment join the row of small observations
he kept for ballast.
Another bird, a car, a single cough from across the street
—
each one filed away,
each one part of the rhythm.

Joy was there.
He felt it in the steadiness of his breath,
in the quiet hum of his fingertips against his thigh.
It rose, but it rose differently now,
pushing through the crust built from years of small wounds.
Thousands of micro-scars,
layered into habit,
a hardened surface formed by correction, by silence, by being told no.

It was still joy,
but joy with resistance.
Like light through frosted glass,
blurred at the edges,
a little sad.

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He closed his eyes for a moment,
holding the stillness as tightly as he dared.
This half hour was his.
No questions, no eyes on him,
no one telling him to move along.
He let himself breathe.

When he opened them,
the world was waiting in its order:
lines of pavement,
shadow of hedge,
the bench beneath him holding steady.
For a moment,
despite everything,
he felt correct.

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When Orin first arrived, he did what he always did: approached the desk, gave his name, folded his coat neatly over his arm. Flin looked up, smiled, and for half a second their eyes touched. He smiled back before he could stop himself. Then the ritual carried them on—details confirmed, a polite thank you—and he moved to the chairs with the rest of the waiting room.

Flin felt the smile replay itself. Had she held it too long? Too wide? She looped it, frame by frame, while tapping the toe of her boot under the desk. The tapping became too loud in her head, so she pressed both feet flat against the floor. Correct.

The waiting room filled itself with small noises. A cough clipped the air. A phone trilled once, then cut off. The printer rattled, then stopped. She tapped the keyboard to clear the screen and tried not to think about the smile again.

Across the room, Orin sat with his hands folded over his coat, eyes not fixed on anything. Every so often they drifted to the painted daisies on her boots, bright yellow

against black leather. Words came to him, then cancelled themselves. Don't say it. Too much. She'll think it strange.

Time passed, the appointment came, and then it was over. He reappeared in the waiting room with his coat folded again, eyes already fixed on the door. Freedom was just ahead. He could leave. That would be correct.

But he stopped. Turned back.

"I love your Doc Martens," he said, careful but steady. " The design on them is cool. Did you paint them yourself?"

"Yes," Flin replied quickly. Certain.

Her hands lifted without thought—two thumbs up, right to her face, cartoon-bright.

Too much.

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Her cheeks burned. Two thumbs? Really? Why both? The loop spun before the gesture even ended. She dragged her hands back down to the desk. Folded them. Correct.

Orin almost added more—how, at her age, he'd painted his own Docs with Siouxsie and the Banshees scrawled down the sides. The memory hovered, ready.

But he saw the flush in her cheeks, the drop of her eyes, the quick retreat of her posture.

Uncomfortable.

So he didn't. He just smiled, soft at the corners, and let the door close behind him.

Flin stayed still, her boots pressed hard against the floor, her hands folded tight. The loop kept replaying—his words, her ridiculous thumbs—but beneath it all a shimmer remained.

A magic moment.

Small as a daisy.
Bright as paint.
Enough to stay.

. ..

She looped the scene in her head: his words — I love your Doc Martens··· did you paint them yourself? Her " Yes," bright, too bright. Then the gesture. Two thumbs. A cartoon of approval. Wrong.

She pressed her hands flat to the counter now, hiding them beneath the papers. Aligned the stack once, twice, until the edges sat square. Correct. Contained.

The waiting room hummed on: pen taps, the cough of the printer, someone's shoes squeaking against tiles. Too loud. She folded into the noise, small as she could make herself.

But under the heat, something lighter stayed. He had noticed the daisies. He had asked. The words replayed softer the second time. Did you paint them yourself? A spark. Small as a daisy. Bright as paint.

Enough to stay.

Act 2 – Repetition

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He arrived earlier than needed, as always. Coat folded once over his arm, steps measured, correct. The waiting room was half-full, chairs squeaking, coughs layering too loudly.

She was at the desk, aligning pens, lips pressed thin. She glanced up as he passed.
Their eyes met — not long, not heavy. Just a flicker, bright enough to jolt her chest.

"Hello," she said, soft as breath.

His pulse caught, almost stuttered. He nodded once, quick, safe. "Hello." The sound rough in his throat, too quiet, but real.

The receptionist shuffled papers. A phone rang, sharp. A child dropped a toy that clattered across the tiles. The moment bent under the weight of noise.

She looped the single word in her head. Hello. Too soft? Too strange? Did it sound right? Heat touched her cheeks. She pressed her hands flat to the counter,

correcting the blotter, aligning it square.

He sat two chairs away, jaw tight, counting ticks of the clock to steady himself. Still, the echo of her voice stayed, fragile, ballast-like.

A word spoken.
A word carried.
Enough to stay.

· ::

Flin

He was closer this time. Just two chairs away. The scrape of his coat as he folded it was louder than the phone ringing.
Her hands pressed flat on the counter, palms damp. The word sat ready — Hello. Simple, correct.

Her lips parted.
Breath lifted.
But his gaze stayed forward, fixed on the clock. The moment slipped. She folded her hands tighter, hid them under the desk.

Orin

Two chairs between them. Too close, almost wrong. His chest jolted with each second hand tick, rehearsed words stacked in his mouth. Good morning. Safe. Just say it.

But the receptionist's pen tapped, tapping out of rhythm. It broke the pattern, knocked the phrase sideways. He swallowed it down, jaw set.

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Her breath caught — he saw it. Knew she had almost spoken.
He stayed still.

Together

Two words rehearsed.
Neither spoken.
The silence hummed louder than sound.

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She looked up as he entered.
For a second her chest lifted, ready, the corners of her mouth twitching upward — the smile rehearsed, folded safe for days.

But his eyes slid past.
Not avoidance, not cruelty — just momentum. Steps measured, coat folded, gaze fixed on the receptionist's desk as if it were a compass point.

The smile wilted before it began, collapsing back into her lips. Heat pressed at her cheeks. Too much. Don't try again.

She bent to the cards, aligning edges. Square. Correct. Hands steady though her chest rattled like glass.

He sat two chairs away, half-turned, listening. Another patient spoke her name — low, casual, a question to the receptionist. It rang too sharp in his ears, doubled. The syllables burned, private but suddenly public. He held it inside, repeated it silently, stored like ballast.

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He almost turned to her then. Almost. But the phone rang, harsh and bright. The chance snapped shut.

She glanced sideways, just once, quick as breath. He was already staring at the floor tiles, counting lines.

A smile missed.
A name overheard.
Both carried separate.

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He gathered his coat, folded once over his arm. Steps measured, correct. At the door he turned, words rising in his throat.

"Have a good day."
Too late. She had already looked back to her desk, pen scratching across the blotter.

The sound came out softer than he intended, almost swallowed by the shuffle of another patient entering, the thud of shoes against wet tiles. He felt it hang in the air without landing.

Her chest jolted at the echo, but the timing jarred. She looped it instantly — was it meant for her? Was it only habit? Her fingers pressed the papers flat, aligning edges, heat climbing her cheeks.

He cursed himself quietly, jaw tight. A second too slow. A breath mistimed. The right words in the wrong place — worse than silence.

The waiting room hummed on: phones, coughs, chair

legs scraping against tiles. Too loud, too layered. He pulled his coat tighter, shoulders folding.

She glanced up once, as if searching, but he was already gone.

A line spoken.
A line missed.
A line carried separate ways.

: ··

Flin

He said it as he passed. Quiet, almost lost under the scrape of a chair:
"Have a good day."

Her chest jolted, heat rising at her collar. Did he mean it? Or was it habit, nothing more? She looped the phrase as if pulling threads, turning it until the meaning blurred.

Her fingers pressed to the desk, flattening papers, hiding the tremor. The line replayed, too bright, too thin.

Orin

He almost didn't speak, but the words slipped out as he turned. "Have a good day." Softer than he intended. Not loud enough.

Shame coiled instantly. Too personal? Too little? He wanted to reach back, correct it, but the moment had already moved on. His jaw tightened, shoulders pulled in.

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The words clattered in his head like coins in a jar.
Hollow. Wrong.

Together

One line, two weights.
For her: a spark bright enough to carry all afternoon.
For him: a bruise that throbbed with doubt.

The same sentence lived two lives, parallel, unspoken.

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The line stretched back to the door.
Coats damp with rain, umbrellas dripping steady on the tiles. Each shuffle forward carried impatience like static.

A man muttered about the wait, voice sharp as gravel. A woman tutted loudly, arms folded, shoes tapping a staccato rhythm. The air thickened with damp wool and disinfectant, wrong scents layered together.

She sat behind the desk, back straight, pen in hand. Her fingers aligned the stack of appointment slips again and again, tapping the edges until they sat square. Correct. Safe. Her chest tight as the voices stacked louder.

He waited near the front of the queue, coat folded neat over his arm. His pulse copied the tapping, too fast. The right words sat rehearsed: Good morning. Just that. But the noise pressed heavy, filling the room, closing all space for speech.

Their eyes caught once through the movement. Not long, not steady — just enough to spark the thought that even here, even in the chaos, there might have been a chance.

: :·

But the next patient snapped a name, pushed forward.
The moment scattered with the sound.

She bent to the blotter, aligning again.
He lowered his gaze, fixed on the floor tiles, counting lines.

The queue moved on.
And so did the chance.

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The phone rang sharp against the walls.
Once. Twice. She lifted it on the third, receiver tucked to her ear.

Her voice shifted, warmer, lighter. "Yes··· I can help you with that." A smile rode through every syllable.

He sat two chairs away, jacket folded, hands aligned. He wasn't meant to be listening — but the change in tone pulled him in, unavoidable. The way her words lifted, softened, carried something gentle he'd never heard directed at him.

The waiting room clattered on. A child kicked at the leg of a chair, plastic thud in wrong rhythm. The printer groaned awake, spitting paper unevenly. Someone sneezed, harsh and wet. Each sound layered, pressing in.

She cradled the phone, tilting her head. Fingers traced the edge of the blotter, correcting its position, square against the desk. The pen tapped once, twice, then stilled.

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He rehearsed silently: Good morning. Just that. Safe. But her voice, still warm for someone else, filled the air. His words folded down before they could rise.

The call ended. She replaced the receiver with care, exact in its cradle.

The silence after was heavier than the ringing had been.

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He turned the wrong corner.
Only one step too far, but enough.

The door was open. He saw her through the frame — head bent over a stack of notes, pen moving in neat lines. The purple clip in her hair flashed once under the strip light.

She looked up. Their eyes met.
Not long. Not planned. A shock of contact, bare and direct.

His chest jolted, a half-breath caught in his throat. Say it now. Anything.
But footsteps echoed behind him, shoes squeaking on the tiles. A man coughed, impatient, the sound shoving the moment sideways.

Heat spread across his face. Too personal. Too sudden. He pulled back, turned sharply, corrected his course.

At the desk, she pressed her fingers to the papers, aligning edges, flattening the disorder left by the glimpse. Her own chest still lifted once, bright, balloon-like. The

word hello pressed at her lips but collapsed, folded into silence.

The wrong step closed itself.
Corridor straightened.
Door shut.

Both carried the flash with them, heavier than speech.

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She had tied it back that morning.
Not all of it — loose strands slipped free, brushing her cheek as she bent over the desk. The purple clip caught the light, flashing once each time she moved.

He noticed immediately. The detail landed and stayed, ballast in his chest. His lips shaped the beginning of a line — It looks nice tied back — but even in thought it rang wrong, too sharp. He closed it down.

The waiting room shuffled around them. A woman coughed, twice, into a tissue that crackled. The door hissed shut then opened again, cold air sliding across the tiles. A man stamped his boots dry, scattering flecks of rain.

She aligned the appointment cards into a straight line, tapped the edge twice to correct it. Her fingers lingered, pressing order into the surface.

He rehearsed the safer option: Good morning. Just that. Ordinary. But the space closed too quickly — a phone lifted, her voice answering, warm for someone else.

He stayed still, hands folded in his lap.
The chance was small, bright, fleeting.
And gone.

…

Flin

He looked her way when the door opened. Just a flicker, enough to spark heat at the back of her neck. She had rehearsed all morning, the word balanced on her tongue: Hello. Small, safe.

Her lips parted. The breath rose.
But the waiting room clattered wrong — a cough too close, the printer stuttering, the phone ringing before she could start. The word folded flat. She pressed her hands under the counter, hidden, fists tight.

Orin

She shifted as he passed, a movement he caught in the corner of his vision. His chest lifted once, words pressed against his teeth. Good morning. He'd said it a dozen times at home, safe in silence. Now it lodged like stone.

The receptionist's phone rang. A man shuffled papers.
The rhythm broke.
He kept walking, jaw locked.

Together

Both had the word ready.
Both let it collapse.

The silence they shared hummed louder than speech.
Bright. Fragile.
Unbearable.

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He set his mug down square on the table.
Handle aligned, steam curling. Correct.

The words had been circling all morning.
Good morning. Nothing more. Ordinary. Safe. He whispered it once, voice rough in the empty room. The sound bounced back too big, too final. He shook his head, tried again, softer. The echo still wrong.

He rehearsed others: How are you today? Too close. Hope the day isn't too busy for you. Too much. Each phrase turned heavy before it left his throat, like stones lined up and dropped.

He walked the kitchen floor, counted tiles. Eight across, ten long. Each step matched to a beat, like tapping out courage. Still the words collapsed.

The smell of coffee clung to his shirt, sharp and warm. The clock ticked behind him, each click another reminder that he was always early, always correct, and still unprepared.

He folded the paper on the table into neat thirds.

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Straight lines, edges aligned. Control in the absence of speech.

The right words never came.
They never had.
Not then. Not now.

He picked up his coat, folded once over his arm.
Stepped out into silence.

⁘

In the mirror before work she tried them again.
Good morning. Simple. Nothing strange.
She shaped her mouth around it, listening to the sound bounce too bright against the bathroom tiles. Wrong. Too sharp.

She softened it. Morning. Just that. One word. Small enough to hide behind. She tried a smile with it, then no smile, then a half-smile that looked like a grimace. Her reflection stared back, unhelpful, accusing.

She pressed her hands flat to the sink. Aligned. Correct. Try again.

Did you sleep well? Too personal.

The weather's better today. Too false, he would know.

I like your coat. No. No. Heat crept into her cheeks even at the thought.

The rehearsals stacked like chairs inside her head, leaning, unstable. Every option wrong. Every option ready to fall.

A drip from the tap echoed each failure. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Her chest tightened with the rhythm.

In the end she whispered nothing.
Closed her lips. Pressed them flat.

At the desk that morning she carried the silence with her, folded neat as the appointment cards.

⁘

Flin

He walked past the desk, steps measured, coat folded over his arm. She caught the edge of his shadow across the counter. Not looking, but seeing. Her fingers pressed flat to the blotter, pen aligned. Her breath shallow.

Say it. Say anything. Even just his name. The chance sat bright in her chest, swelling like three balloons tied to her ribs. Lifted, lifted—too high. She let it go. Folded the moment flat.

Orin

Her hair was different today. Light bent across it, clipped and sharp. He saw the detail, stored it like ballast in his chest. The words lined up: It suits you. Small, ordinary. Safe.

But the waiting room hummed wrong — printer coughing, shoes squeaking on tiles, clock tick cutting too loud. The words fell apart before they reached his mouth. He kept walking, jaw tight, eyes forward.

Together

A silence hung between them, stretched taut like wire.
Bright for a second, unbearable.
Neither spoke.
Neither dared.
The moment passed.

⁘

She had cut it.

Not much — just shorter at the fringe, sharper around her cheeks. Enough to tilt the light differently.

He saw it as soon as he entered, before he even checked in. The way the strip light slid across the darker strands, the way the purple clip caught and flashed.

His chest lifted once, as if his body thought words were coming. It suits you. That was the line. Small, safe, correct. It suits you.

But the waiting room was already thick with sound. The door slammed twice in quick rhythm. The printer shrieked and jammed, a nurse muttered under her breath. Someone's deodorant clouded the air, sharp and chemical. Too much stacked at once, too fast.

He held the words behind his teeth. The chance thinned even as he rehearsed. She looked up, caught him just for a second, and her hand moved to align the stack of appointment cards on the desk. Straight. Correct. A gesture that closed the space again.

⁘

He nodded instead, the smallest of movements. Not sure if she even saw.
The words stayed folded.
Pressed flat.
Safe, but unsaid.

⁘

The phone rang once.
Twice.
Three times before she lifted it.

Her voice softened, wrapped in warmth not meant for him.

"Yes… of course… we can arrange that."

A smile shaped her tone; he could hear it even without looking.

He sat with his back straight, hands clasped. Listening. The hum of the light above buzzed against the ringing still in his ears, layers stacked until his chest felt tight. He wanted to be the reason her voice lifted like that. Wanted, but could not claim.

A child coughed near the door, plastic toy clattering against the floor tiles. A man grumbled about the wait, pacing. The printer coughed too, spitting paper at odd intervals. Each sound layered wrong, pressing in.

She cradled the receiver, gentle as if it were breakable. Her fingers tapped the desk once, then stilled. She wrote a note in neat lines, pen angled square. Aligned. Correct.

⁘ ⁘

He rehearsed silently: Good morning. Just say good morning.
The words folded, collapsed.
Her phone call had stolen the space.

The silence after rang louder than the bell itself.

He lowered his gaze, fixed on the floor tiles, counting their lines.
Square by square.
Safe.
Silent.

∵∴

The receptionist called out a name that wasn't his.
Close, but wrong. One syllable bent sideways.
For a moment he almost stood. Almost.

His body half-rose, hands twitching toward the chair arms. Heat flushed up his neck before he caught it, folded himself small again.
Not him. Not yet. Sit. Correct.

She had seen. He knew she had. Her head lifted from the papers, eyes catching his movement. Not long enough to hold, not long enough to anchor — but enough. The air between them shifted, tilted.

The waiting room was too bright today. White strip lights humming, fizzing, pooling shadows into the corners. A man at the far end coughed until it rattled, then cursed softly into his sleeve. The smell of damp coats thickened in the air.

He rehearsed the line again, the safe one: Good morning. Just that. But the wrong name still echoed in his skull, offbeat, discordant.

⁘

She went back to her desk, aligning papers, aligning pens, pressing order into the surface of chaos.

A moment lingered. A chance, thin as thread.
He did not take it.

The next name was called, correct this time.
He stayed still.
Still.
Still.

⁘

The wall clock ticked louder than it should have.
Each click stretched the air, sharp as glass.
Her pulse caught it, copied it: one, one, one.

Patients shuffled in, coats wet with rain, umbrellas dripping on the tiles. The receptionist tapped her pen against the counter, three beats at a time, too fast, too close. The printer woke suddenly, coughing paper. Phones rang over each other, never leaving space.

He sat two chairs away, jacket folded neatly across his lap, eyes fixed on the second hand jerking forward. Half a minute early, still correct. Safe, for now. He rehearsed: just say hello. Just that. Small, safe, ordinary.

But the noises stacked, layers pressing cough, bell, printer, pen, tick. Wrong rhythm. His chest tightened, breath shrinking. The words collapsed inside his throat.

She glanced at him once — not too long, not too short. Enough. Her fingers pressed flat on the desk, aligning the pen with the blotter, correcting the space.

A pause opened. Empty. Waiting.

⁘

He did not fill it.

The clock clicked on.
Clicked on.
Clicked on.

∵ ∴

Act 3 – The Monster

⋱.:

The clock on the wall jabbed with every tick.

Not gentle, not background — sharp as a pin pushed again and again into the same spot.
Thirty minutes early, both, correct as always.
But the air had changed.

Stillness wasn't safety anymore.

It was running out.

Flin straightened the forms on her desk.
Edges sharp, paper rasping under her fingertips.
The pile leaned, she corrected it, leaned again.

Her chest matched the same pattern — lift, fall, wrong.

The disinfectant smell caught in her throat, thicker than usual, sour-sweet, impossible to ignore.

Across the room Orin sat in his place, ballast-like, posture held.
But his eyes betrayed him: flicking to the clock, then away.
Three weeks of rhythm coiled into his muscles, each appointment a beat, a refrain.
Now the refrain was faltering.
He rehearsed lines he would never say.

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Thank you. You've been kind. I wish—
Each phrase rose like breath on a cold window, then faded before it showed.

Noise stacked.
A cough cracked from the corner, far too loud.
Footsteps slapped the linoleum.
Phones rang out of time, one, then another, then another.
The Monster slipped between the sounds, faceless, closer, its breath pressing against the back of Orin's neck.

Flin glanced up, once.
Her lips parted.
Then pressed shut again.
The weight of the week bore down like stacked files balanced too high, ready to topple.

The clock drove on.
Tick. Tick. Tick.

Nearly gone.

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Nearly gone.
Nearly gone.

⋱

The lights tore the room apart.
Red, white, red again.
Smoke thickened, sweat stung, every surface pulsed.

She was no receptionist now.
No quiet bench, no folded hands.
Boots planted on stage, daisies smeared dark.
Microphone gripped like a blade.
Her throat opened, raw, and the first scream came loose.

THIS ISN'T MY FUCKING PLAN.

It ripped the air in two.
The crowd answered, fists raised, spit flying, lungs shattering against the noise.
Behind her he hunched, wires snaking from the synth, fingers hammering patterns until the machine shrieked.
His sound laid a floor of thunder for her fire.

[Verse 1]
I wake up with a rulebook nailed to my chest,
Tick-box humans tell me what is best.
Half an hour early, half a life too late,

Chairs squeak, lights buzz, breathe — hesitate.

[Chorus]
THIS ISN'T MY FUCKING PLAN!
(Slam the desk, slam the door, slam the man!)
THIS ISN'T MY FUCKING PLAN!
(It was never mine; it was never mine!)

The crowd roared it back, a hundred throats, a monster made of voices.
Every reply, a mirror of her own rage, multiplied, unstoppable.

[Verse 2]
Monster breathing at the back of my throat,
Shame in my pockets, dragging my coat.
Silence louder than the things I say,
I burn inside but I look away.

[Bridge – Synth / Orin's section]
Circuit sparks, rhythm splits,
Pattern breaks, feedback hits.
Machine screams, wires bleed,

∴∴

Loops collapse; we're finally freed.

She bent double, hair slick with sweat, spit flying from the mic.
He drove the synth harder, notes collapsing into pure distortion, a howl of metal and light.
The stage shook.
The floor shook.
The whole world shook.

[Final Chorus]
THIS ISN'T MY FUCKING PLAN!
(Tear the glass, tear the skin, tear the land!)
THIS ISN'T MY FUCKING PLAN!
(Not his, not hers, not anyone's!)

[Collapse / Outro]
Lights cut.
Crowd gone.
Breath raw.
Silence.

Not his plan.

⋱ ⋮ ⋰

Not hers.
Not anyone's.

⁘

Flin sat on the bench outside the surgery doors.
Thirty minutes early, as always.
Correct. Safe. The rule hadn't changed.

But the air was thinner this morning.
Her body carried no hum, no secret fizz.
She set her boots square on the paving stones, checked the daisies painted on them once, twice — aligned — yet the gesture gave her no lift.
It was just routine.

Birds still sang.
A robin hopped the hedge line, chirping bright.
But the rhythm fell wrong.
Too quick, then too slow, notes spilling without order.
She tried to line them up in her mind, to fold the sound into pattern — but it slipped loose, uncatchable.

She thought of the seat beside her.
How he should be there now.
The creak of his coat, the slow way he sat, careful, not crowding.
She almost heard it: the wooden slat giving underweight,

the sight of him folding into place.
But the bench stayed unbent, unbroken, wood holding its shape.
Silence where there should have been sound.

Her chest felt flat.
No threads lifting, no balloons tugging.
Even the morning light seemed drained, colours dulled, as though the world itself had stepped back.

She sat anyway.
Half an hour early.
Still correct.
Still waiting.

The surgery doors opened, closed, names were called.
Not his. Not hers.

She waited.

He didn't come.

∴∴

The clock on the wall ticked.
Too loud tonight, though it had always ticked the same.
Each second a small hammer, driving emptiness deeper.

He set the mug on the table.
Steam rose, bitter and thin.
The smell of coffee clung too sharp in his throat, filling a space that should have been taken by something else — the sound of her voice, the rhythm of the waiting room.
But the house gave him nothing back.

The lamp by his chair spread its amber circle, steady but hollow.
Light without weight.
It reached no further than the table's edge, leaving the rest of the room in grey.
The shadow of his hand stretched long across the page in front of him, pen poised but unwilling to move.

He listened to the fridge hum.
It filled the silence with a droning persistence, a sound that should have been ballast, but instead pressed down

on him like a lid.
Even the house itself seemed to remind him: no words tonight.

Normally, he would replay the day.
Every pause, every almost-said line.
He would line them up neat, like chairs in rows, inspect each one, and decide where it had gone wrong.
But tonight, there was nothing to replay.
Only the absence.
Only the gap where she should have been.

He closed the notebook without writing.
The pen rolled sideways and stopped.
He sat still, listening to the tick, the hum, the silence pressing harder.

He had nothing to loop but absence.

:··

The reception was still.
Too still.
Her breath seemed to echo back at her, louder than it should, trapped between glass and plastic.

She sorted papers just to hear them shift.
The rasp of sheets stacking, neat, aligned — a rhythm she could control.
Each shuffle louder than the one before, as if the sound were trying to speak for her.

"Have a good day," she mouthed, lips shaping the line without breath.
Again.
And again.
Each time a little softer, until her jaw clenched and the words dissolved before they left.

The phone rang.
Sharp. Too sharp.
She grabbed the receiver too quickly, voice catching in her throat, then forced calm into the words.
When it clicked dead again, the silence closed heavier

than before.

Her fingers found the pen on the desk.
Tap. Tap. Tap.
She tried to line the rhythm with her breath.
Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.
The tapping became its own loop, too loud, so she pressed the pen flat under her palm until it stopped.

Her chest ached with all the unsaid lines piling up inside.
Every phrase rehearsed, none of them real.
They circled like birds in a room with no exit, wings beating against her ribs.

Over and over.
Never out loud.

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Her lens
The reception was too quiet.
The chair beside her gaped open, empty, louder than any voice.
Fluorescent tubes hummed above, one light stuttering a half-beat wrong, the flicker tapping against her eyelid.
She pressed her hands flat to the desk, trying to hold the surface steady.
The absence pressed back harder.

His lens
The lamp by his chair glowed a dull amber, steady but heavy, throwing his shadow against the wall.
The hum of its filament filled the room, small but insistent, like a wire stretched too tight.
He shifted a page, pen idle in his hand.
The silence beside him was thicker than paper, heavier than words.

Both
Different rooms, different lights, but the same silence threaded between them.
Her fluorescent buzz.
His lamp hum.

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Two rhythms out of step, yet echoing all the same.

Two ghosts, now in different rooms.

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The windowpane breathed cold against her forehead.
She leaned just close enough for the chill to press, then pulled back, then leaned again — testing, measuring.
Each touch left a faint mist that vanished before she could count to three.

Outside, rain threaded down the glass in crooked lines.
Not chaos — not to her.
She followed each drop with her eyes, tracking the way two would run parallel, meet at a junction, then split again.
A pattern, fragile but there.
She whispered the counts in her head: one, two, three.
Start again.

Headlights bent through the wet, smeared into long ribbons that pulsed across the wall.
They flickered like stage lights, but softer, held back by glass.
Each pulse matched the rise of her chest, ballooning small, sharp, unbearable.

Behind her, the kettle hissed, then clicked.

The sound softened the silence, filled it with something that felt almost like care.
She held onto it, replayed it, made it steady.

Her hand pressed flat against the sill, fingers stretched until they aligned with the grooves in the wood.
Correct. Aligned.
Order against the storm outside.

The world beyond the pane blurred and brightened, too far to touch but still hers to hold in rhythm.
She thought of the bench.
Of birds and rain counted as music.
Of him.

Her chest lifted again, strings tied invisible, tugging her upwards.
Anything.
At all.
Ready.

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The lamp cast its circle, warm but too narrow, leaving the corners of the room in shadow.
Paper stacked neat before him, spine of the notebook sharp against his wrist.
He smoothed the page flat, thumb pressed to the margin until it stopped curling.
Order first. Always order.

The pen felt heavy, balanced.

Ink touched the surface and made its mark — a sound small but steady: scratch, pause, scratch.
The rhythm pleased him.
Like footsteps measured on a path, correct, aligned.

Words came slow.

Not the words he had wanted to say — never those — but others, safer, folded.
He wrote about the day, the bench, the light through glass.
He wrote about boots and painted flowers without ever writing her.
He circled the truth without landing.

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The smell of paper rose, faint dust and pulp.
It filled the room, a ballast against the fridge hum,
against the silence thick in his throat.
He breathed it in, steady, steady, as though it could hold
him upright.

Scratch, pause, scratch.
His hand cramped. He flexed it once, shook it loose,
then continued.
The lines marched neat across the page, as if neatness
could make up for all the things unsaid.

He stopped at last, pen set down exact on the desk.
He closed the notebook carefully, palms flat on the cover
as if sealing it shut.

He wrote instead.
He always wrote instead.

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Flin
The reception desk was too quiet now.
She pressed the end of her pen against paper, then lifted, then pressed again.
Tap. Pause. Tap.
A pattern, small but hers — each sound a knock she wished she could send across the room.

She thought of his voice, the way it caught before words left.
She thought of saying his name aloud, just once.
But the air stayed unbroken.

Orin
At his table, the pen dragged steady across the page.
Scratch, pause, scratch.
The sound folded into the lamp's low hum, ballast keeping him anchored.
He paused, the ink waiting.
For what? For whom?

He thought of her hands at the desk, fingers restless, looping.

He thought of standing there again, just long enough to speak.
But silence held.

Flin
Tap. Pause. Tap.
The sound returned to her alone.
She folded the page away.

Orin
Scratch. Pause. Scratch.
The words sank back into the paper.
He closed the notebook.

Together
Different rooms. Different lights.
Her tap, his scratch — rhythms aligned, never touching.
Two lines almost meeting, drawn apart by silence.

Together apart.
Always.

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The room held itself in glass.
Walls stretched clear, trembling with every sound.
Not stone, not plaster — brittle transparency, waiting to break.

Her heartbeat struck hard.
One beat. Another.
Each thud ricocheted, doubled, louder, as though the glass itself was drumming her chest.

Light fractured.
A cough cracked the silence — fissure racing like lightning across a pane.
A single footstep rang sharp, shattering a line outward.

She pressed her palms flat to the desk.
Cold. Smooth. Brittle.
It shivered under her touch, as though begging to give way.

Heartbeat again. Faster. Louder.
Glass split. The room burst outward, shards flung like stars.

They spun midair, glittering, each one a frozen note of music.

She lifted her eyes.

The shards hung, suspended, singing in silence — a choir made of fracture.
Edges brushed her skin, sting-sharp, fading before they landed.

Then the sound died.
Fragments vanished into nothing.
Walls gone. Room gone. World gone.

No voices. No waiting. No him.
Only absence, sharp and complete.

Everything broken.
Nothing spoken.

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Act 4 – Aftermath

The book was heavier than it looked.
Cloth on the spine rough against her fingertips, thread ends raised like tiny burrs. She turned it and the weight shifted slow in her hands, a compact block that wanted to settle, not be lifted. Dust and ink rose faint in the warm air of the room, a smell like old paper bags and pencil shavings. The lamp made a small circle of gold on the desk; everything outside that circle fell away.

She laid the book flat and pressed her palms to the cover. Warm already from her skin. The ridge of the spine pushed into her left palm; she matched her fingers to the printed title as if measuring her hand to the words.
One breath in.
One breath out.
Correct.

She opened it slow.
The hinge whispered. Paper rasped, thin and dry, edges a little feathery against her thumbs. Lines marched neat across the page, aligned, exact. The tidy black of the type settled her in the way squares on tiles did, in the way aligned boots did. Every row kept its lane. Every margin

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held. Relief flickered in her chest at their order, at the rightness of it, the sense of a room tidied. His voice held still there — not sound, but shape. The words he had never managed to make with his mouth were here, squared and inked, ready to be seen.

Her chest lifted, ballooned sharp, then folded.
The lamp light spilled too bright across the paper, white pooling, white stabbing. She narrowed her eyes, not to cry, but to soften the flare. Her throat clicked.
Her breath snagged, shuddered, stopped, then broke free in a thin release. She adjusted the lamp head with two fingers; it squeaked, then held.

She read.

First paragraph, slow. Her lips didn't move, but in her head a quiet voice placed each word on a shelf. She felt them settle.
Every sentence pressed weight into her hands, ballast-heavy, dragging at her wrists. Yet each one carried a small lift too: he had spoken, at last, even if only here. The lift and the drag together made a strange see-saw inside her

chest. Up. Down. Up. Down.

Heat ran across her cheeks; she knew it was there before any wetness.
Tears slid anyway, uninvited, salt catching on her lips. She blinked them back and failed, but the blur softened the glare into a kinder white. She didn't wipe her face. One hand stayed clamped to the right edge of the book, the other hovered ready to turn.

A line stopped her. She read it again. Then again.
He had noticed the daisies on her boots. Not a generic flower. Not "flowers," not "paint." Daisies. Small suns, she had thought once, in secret. Here, he had written them down. He had seen them; he had placed them.
Lift.
Then the drag: he had not said it at the time. He had stored it for the page.

She went back two sentences to watch the words arrive. She tried them with different rhythms in her head: slower, faster, clipped, smoothed. Each rhythm gave the line a new weight. She settled on the one that sounded

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most like him — ballast in the middle of the sentence, steadiness toward the end.

Another page.
A memory folded there: the soft "hello" at the desk, not mocked, not expanded, not turned into a speech, just held. The chair creak had been not just a noise to him but a measurement of distance. He had written the cough from the corridor as a metronome. She had felt that day as pressure on her skin; he had turned it into beats on a page.
Lift. Drag.

She turned back to the first page to check the straightness of the margins again. The margins were true. She touched the left margin with her finger, a straight rail. Safe. She touched the right margin, another rail. Caught between them, the words did not spill.

She read.

He wrote the waiting room light as "quiet knives," which was wrong and right at once. Knives were too much, but

the thinness was correct, that slicing thinness that made the air feel sharp in her nose. He wrote the disinfectant as a clean throat-sting. He wrote the paper stack on her desk as a small city of rectangles — and suddenly she saw it the way he had: a skyline of to-do. He had been watching, not to judge, but to store.

She swallowed, slow. The swallow caught, then slid. She felt the book's weight pull at her wrists again. She shifted grip. The cloth scraped her palm in a familiar way now. Her left thumb found a nick on the edge of the paper and worried it gently until the fiber lifted; she stopped, corrected, smoothed it down with the pad of her thumb until it lay flat again. Aligned. Correct.

She read.

Half a page later, another line snagged. He had written the moment in the doorway — the almost-smile, the intake of breath that never formed a word — and he had not made her silly or loud. He had not called her "too much." He had simply recorded the heat on her cheeks

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and the angle of her hands and the speed of the day. He had written: timing missed by seconds is not the same as silence. She read that five times. Each time, her chest opened a fraction, then closed again, like the tiny mouth of a bird in a nest.

She lifted her head and looked at the room so she wouldn't drown in the page. The lamp's circle was still gold. Dust motes hung in it, drifting slow. The kettle in the kitchen clicked once as it cooled. The quiet here was different from the quiet in the surgery. No fluorescent buzz. No coughs rebounding. Only the small hum of her own house, and the tiny rasp of paper when she moved.

She turned the page.

A daisy again. A line of brightness. Joy threaded through grief, unbearable together. He had not used the word " joy." He had not used the word "grief." He had done the thing he did: he put light next to weight and let their pressure explain each other.
Her throat tightened as if a hand had gently pressed there to remind her to keep still. She kept still.

Her hands stayed firm on the book.

She read.

He had a section that was only sounds: bell, cough, sigh, shoe squeak, ring, shuffle. No commentary. Just a column of noises. She traced the list with her finger, one by one. She could hear them, all at once, and then in order, and then not at all. She flipped back to the first sound and counted the letters, then counted the sounds, then counted the lines in the list. Counting was a way to keep from floating up and out through the ceiling. Counting was weight. She counted again. The numbers stayed.

She turned the page.
Her fingers left a small half-moon of sweat on the corner; she rubbed it off with the heel of her hand. The paper made a soft complaining sound and then settled, forgiving.

A sentence about the bench appeared — not today's bench, but the first bench. He wrote about the robin, the pigeons, the squirrel, the bee, not as a scene but as

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instruments. He had seen the same orchestra she had conducted, only he had listened from behind the glass of his own ribs. The line said: the street wanted to be in time.
She made the smallest sound in her throat, more a breath than a voice. She let it pass and did not chase it.

At the bottom of the page, a small block of text held a thing he had not told her: that being half an hour early had felt like safety to him too. That early was the only way to make sense. That early meant there was room for mistakes to happen and be corrected before the world began. He called it "making a pocket for breath." She pressed the heel of her hand into her sternum and felt the pressure answer back from bone.
Pocket for breath.
Yes.

She read.

The next page lifted the Monster without naming it. He wrote about a weight that sat to the left of his collarbone whenever he almost spoke. He wrote the tap he felt under his ribs when he imagined being refused. He wrote

a shadow that moved across the floor with other people' s footsteps, a shadow that would sit between him and the desk even when the desk was empty. She had a word for it. He did not use the word. He simply built it from edges and air until it was real.
She nodded once, almost without moving her head. Agreement pulled something low in her belly like a thread.

Her shoulders sagged, breath in broken rhythms. Hands clamped on the spine, knuckles pale. Still she read, lifted and weighted at once.

She turned back. She needed to check something. She found the paragraph about the "have a good day" that arrived late. He had not laughed at her timing. He had written: a kindness misplaced is still a kindness; it lands, just not where intended. She held that sentence to the light, watched the ink sit on the paper like a thin skin, watched the edges of the letters bloom slightly into the fibers. She ran her fingertip above the line without touching it, as if heat might rise from the words.

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A sound outside the window — tyres on wet tarmac — brushed the edge of her hearing and slipped away. The room held steady. She brought her eyes back to the book.

She read.

He wrote himself small. Not a hero, not a confession, not an argument for himself. He put himself in two places only: as a hand holding a pen, and as a pair of eyes seeing. The rest of the page he gave to the room, to her, to the noise, to the way paper stacks lean, to the way shoes squeak, to the way the door hinge complains even when oiled. He had been careful. The care made the lift in her chest painful.
A good pain. A necessary pain.
Lift/drag. Lift/drag.

She turned another page.

Here was a line not about her at all: words are ballast — they keep the vessel from flipping in a crosswind. She read it, then read it again with different emphasis: words

are ballast / words are ballast. The second one fit his mouth better. She imagined him writing at the lamp, hand cramped, the pen catching on rough spots where the paper changed grain. She could almost hear the scratch. Scratch, pause. Scratch.

Her right hand twitched in response on the book's edge, a small answering pulse.

She read.

At the top of the next page he had written: you are always aligned. The sentence stood alone, surrounded by white space. It was not a compliment; it was a measurement. The words were simple, but the white around them was almost louder — a little square of held breath. She stared at it until the black of the letters seemed to dim and the white behind them seemed to gleam. Her cheeks warmed again. Her mouth held the taste of salt and paper.

She looked to the lamp. The circle of light had shifted. A shadow from her wrist lay across the lower lines; she moved her elbow a few millimetres until the shadow left.

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Correct. She smoothed the right-hand page with her palm. The paper was cool under the heat of her skin.

She read.

There were no big declarations anywhere. No "always," no "forever," no "I love you." There was her name once, placed in a sentence as if to test its weight in the line, and then there were descriptions: the way she folded her hands, the way her shoulders dropped when a phone stopped ringing, the way she counted raindrops. He wrote: counting is a way to stay. She read that and counted the words in the sentence — five — and then the letters in "stay" — four — and then the number of times he had used the word "stay" in the last three pages — one. She counted again. One. It was enough.

She turned the page.
Her hand slipped a little on the bottom corner; the paper made a soft hiss. She corrected, brought the corner up in a clean turn, set it down. The book breathed out a tiny well of air that smelled like the inside of a cupboard.

He had taken the reception room apart like a machine and laid the pieces out, clean, side by side: light, sound, plastic, paper, glass. Then he had put them back together with care, leaving out the parts that cut. No — not leaving them out. Filing their edges. She could feel the care in the way he refused to call her wrong for being loud inside, even when she was quiet outside. It unknotted something small at the base of her skull.

She read.

A paragraph near the bottom named nothing and everything at once: timing is a fragile animal that startles if you reach for it; sit still and it comes to your hand. She let that one sit. It matched the way she had learned to hold joy — still, still, still, as if any sudden movement would make it fly. She had called it the secret bird in her palms. He had found the animal too, only called it by a different name and trained it with patience on a page.

She turned another page. The page stuck for a second; she separated the edges with her nail. The paper gave

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and made a small unfurling sound. She smiled without knowing she had, a light twist at the corner of her mouth that hurt and soothed at the same time.

Her eyes blurred, cleared, blurred.
She did not wipe her face.
She stayed with the words.

At the top of the next page the type thinned slightly, as if the ink had run low. She tilted the book to bring more light and the faint letters sharpened. He had written about leaving things unsaid as an act of care, not of fear. He had written: the right word at the wrong time bruises. She rolled the word "bruises" silently in her mouth and felt its soft shape, the way it ended without a hard edge. She thought of all the times she had arrived with a word a beat late and watched it fall to the floor. The book lifted those fallen words with two fingers and set them back on the table.

She read.

She reached the place where his sentences grew shorter. The rhythm compressed. Scratch. Pause. Scratch. She

could hear it. The lamp hummed steady, and his rhythm threaded through it like a second wire. Her own breath caught the pattern despite herself. In. Hold. Out. Hold. She matched the page the way she matched footsteps on stairs when she was trying not to draw attention. The matching kept her inside the circle of light.

She turned back three pages to re-find the daisies. She did not want them to be less bright than she first felt them. They weren't. Small suns, lined up on leather, written as if they could light a room. She pressed her thumb into the daisy on the page as if it were a button that might click. It didn't. Still, she felt the ghost of a click in her joint. She exhaled through her nose, a small ribbon of warmth.

She read.

Toward the end he wrote himself again: not as apology, but as practice. I write instead of speaking. The sentence did not ask forgiveness. It described a mechanism. Then another line, the last line he allowed himself before the page turned to white: I will store the weight so you can

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breathe. She set the pad of her index finger on the dot of the final full stop and left it there for one slow count of five.

She let the book rest for a moment, open, the pages like wings. The lamp heat gathered on the inside curve of the paper. Her hands made half-moons on either side. She imagined the book as a chest, not his chest, not hers, a neutral chest that rose and fell just enough to show life. She waited to see if the breath of it would settle. It did.

She read.

A final page. The paper at the back felt rougher, a little more raw, as if the stack had been cut there. The words were thinner here too, but certain. They did not wobble or plead. They offered their weight the way a hand offers a parcel. She took it. Her wrists ached, but not in a way that meant stop. In a way that meant this is heavy, yes, and we are still doing it.

She read until the lines blurred past meaning.
She tried to return to the beginning of the paragraph, but the letters had turned to shapes and the shapes had

turned to stairs and the stairs had turned to nothing useful. She closed her eyes, then opened them and found the place again by the position on the page — upper left, two inches down, three words in. Correct.

Until her body gave way before her will did.
Her shoulders folded. Her chin dipped. The spine of the book pressed a clean line into the soft of her right palm. She felt that line and did not move her hand.

She cried.
Quietly. Alone.

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The Ghosts Speak

Grey on the edges, the hours collapse,
A fog that is faster than time as it traps.
The chair is unsteady, the clock is unkind,
We leave our own bodies; we fall out of mind.

Silence is louder than words ever made,
A weight in the ribcage, a shadow that stayed.
We swallow confessions, we bury our breath,
Each pause is a coffin, rehearsed into death.

Yet in the still waiting, a flicker is shown,
A hand brushed with trembling, a love never known.
No vow, no embrace, no kiss to declare -
Just ghosts in the hallway, alive in despair.

The world will not see us, it passes us by,
But we are not broken, we burn, we defy.
Two ghosts in the quiet, too tender to speak,
Too human, too haunted, too fragile, too weak.

So read us, remember, let silence be proof —
That love without speaking still clings to the roof.
And when you feel fog in the bones that you keep,
Know ghosts have their feelings — they love, and they weep.

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About the Author

Merrin W. Dream lives in York, where fog carries its own stories.
Hidden lives, unspoken bonds, and the quiet defiance of those the world does not see.

vaelinya.uk/two-ghosts